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SUBJECT: BLOC QUEBECOIS INTERNALLY DIVIDED OVER AFGHANISTAN

QUEBEC 00000041 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Abigail Friedman, Consul General, Quebec City,
State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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¶1. (c) Summary: A Bloc Quebecois (BQ) MP told CG March 22 that Bloc members fiercely debated BQ leader Gilles Duceppe's decision not to object in the coming parliamentary session to Canada's military presence in Afghanistan. Discussion within the party on Afghanistan is not yet closed. Other priority issues for the Bloc will include: CIA planes; softwood lumber; the environment; WHTI; missile defense; mad cow; and dairy product regulations. The Bloc, with the deciding vote, will seek to work with the Conservatives, according to our contact, and will not take on the minority government until it is time to bring them down. End summary.

¶2. (c) In a meeting with CG in Quebec City, March 22, a Bloc MP stated that the following would be priority issues for the party in the coming Parliamentary session (in no particular order):

- Afghanistan
- the environment (Kyoto)
- CIA planes
- softwood lumber
- missile defense
- WHTI
- mad cow
- milk products
- internet pharmacies

On matters relating specifically to Quebec, the Bloc will focus on:

- fiscal imbalance
- the environment
- day-care
- Quebec's place in the world

Afghanistan

¶3. (C) The Bloc MP said there had been a huge debate over what position the Bloc should take on Afghanistan during the party's

most recent caucus gathering. Several Bloc members are still seething from Gilles Duceppe's decision not to object to Canada's military presence there. (Comment: Duceppe is well known for his firm, at times less-than-democratic approach to running his party. End comment.) While Duceppe made the call, he apparently has agreed to allow the matter to be discussed again at the next caucus meeting.

¶4. (U) According to the party's public statements, "The BQ in no way calls into question the legitimacy of the mission that was confided to the Canadian military upon its departure for Afghanistan but we believe the parameters of this mission have evolved since that time. In transferring from Kabul to Kandahar, they (Canadian troops) are going to be called upon to play a role that is less and less defensive and more and more offensive in nature.... The Bloc is fully aware that Canada has committed itself before the international community and the Afghan govt. to be present until the beginning of next year and that it is unthinkable to withdraw from one day to the next. This engagement is even more important as the Canadian military has now assumed the command of NATO forces in the south of Afghanistan. We believe nonetheless that the evolution of the situation as well as that information is only reaching the population in dribbles, amply justifies that this matter be submitted for discussion in parliament in the coming weeks." (Consulate translation.)

Other Matters of U.S. Interest

¶5. (c) On other matters, our contact said that the Bloc would call for an investigation of alleged CIA planes transiting and stopping in Canada. The Bloc also is watching closely the softwood lumber debate between the U.S. and Canada, which our contact agreed needs to be resolved through negotiation. Finally, the Bloc also will track Quebec/Canadian subsidies in the dairy sector that may come under U.S. scrutiny. The Bloc wants to protect these subsidies, considering them "necessary" to the survival of the industry.

QUEBEC 00000041 002.2 OF 002

Canada/Quebec Relations

¶6. (c) The Bloc MP indicated to CG that Duceppe is seeking harmony with the Harper government. The Bloc has the deciding vote and when the Bloc goes against the Conservatives, "it will be to bring the government down." Until then, our contact expects the Bloc will seek to find commonalities rather than differences with the ruling party. Our contact expects the coming Parliamentary session to be much more manageable than the previous session under the Liberals. "The Conservatives may have positions that the Bloc does not share, but the Bloc at least has a pretty good idea of what these are. With the Liberals, you never knew whether they meant what they were saying."

¶7. (c) On specific Quebec-Ottawa issues, our contact said that the Bloc will be sounding out various Quebec stakeholders in the coming months on fiscal imbalance; the environment; day-care; and Quebec's place in the world. The Bloc is looking for Harper to honor the agreement of the previous Liberal government to fund Quebec daycare. As for Quebec's place in the world, the MP was skeptical that the Prime Minister would be able to live up to his promise for Quebec to have a seat at UNESCO. After all, if UNESCO agreed, what would happen when other provinces, states, and regions of the world then asked for the same thing?

Comment

¶8. (c) While the Bloc has the deciding vote in the next parliament, it wants to avoid bringing the government down and triggering elections even more than PM Harper and the ruling

party. The Bloc has not yet digested its loss of ridings in Quebec and the Conservative's gains. The series of Bloc meetings with Quebec "stakeholders" is just the beginning of what will likely be a long process of the Bloc's trying to figure out what went wrong and how the party can rebuild support.

FRIEDMAN